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A
S E R M O N

Preach'd in the
Cathedral CHURCH
O F
W O R C E S T E R,
August the 3^d 1705,
A T T H E
A S S I Z E S.

By GEORGE WALLS D. D. Prebendary of
that Church.

Published at the Command of the Right Reverend
Father in God, WILLIAM Lord Bishop of WO R-
C E S T E R; but delay'd on account of the great
and long Illness of the Author.

L O N D O N:

Printed by W. B. for RICHARD SARE at Grays-Inn-
Gate in Holborn. 1706.

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Cathedral Church

OF

WORCESTER

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PROV. XXIV. 29.

*Say not I will do to him as he hath
done to me, I will render to the Man
according to his Work.*

THE Words are a direct prohibition of revenging Injuries, and recompencing Evil for Evil, and give us a Rule of Duty in case of wrong done us. And indeed, this Duty of Forgiveness is so peculiarly a Lesson taught us by that God that is Love, and would have us to be so, that nothing less than Revelation seems fully to instruct us in it. And so great is the Importance of the Duty, or the Difficulty of its Access to our Minds, that when our Great Master and Teacher of all Devotion, gave his Disciples that excellent and most perfect Form of Prayer, he was not pleas'd to rely barely upon his Authority (as great as it was) in enjoyning that Petition, that relates to our forgiving Trespases against us, but repasses upon it, vouchsafing to back this one with a Reason, writing a short Comment upon the hard Text. And it seems a good Argument that the Duty is clearly deducible, from no standing and unalterable Principle of corrupt Nature, in that the Philosophers when they pretend to state it to us, sometimes differ from themselves, (to go no farther than *Aristotle*) and frequently from one another, some making Revenge the lawful Issue of Fortitude, as others did patient

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⁸ *Tully* laying down the fundamental Law of Justice, tells us 'tis, That no Man do another any harm; but with this Exception, unless he be provok'd to it; which made *Lactantius* cry out, that he had corrupted an honest great Truth by adding two Words to it, having destroy'd his Law by this short gloss upon it. If *Hierocles*, *Plutarch*, *Antonius* and *Seneca* enforce the Duty with due Advantage, and the whole Commonwealth of the *Lacedemonians* make it a solemn part of their Devotions, that they may be † enabled to bear Injuries; we find *Volusianus* in *St. Austin* complaining to *Marcellinus*, that Christ's preaching and Doctrine concerning forgiving Injuries were destructive of Government, and inconsistent with the Being of Commonwealths. So that

^a *Iustitia primum munus est, ne cui quis noceat nisi laceſſitus injuriâ. Cic.*
Off. Lib. 1.

^b Quam simplicem veramque sententiam duorum verborum adjectione corrumpit.

* Prædicatio & doctrina Christi reipub. moribus nulla ex parte convenient.
Marcellin. Epist. 4. ad August.

in Truth the Philosophers were for, or against Revenge, as they were dispos'd by Constitution, or engag'd by Interest; as their Spirits had been embitter'd by the hard usage, or sweetned by the kindness of those they liv'd under, or conversed with. They often fram'd their Books according to the Emperor's Inclination and Practice, adapted their Rules to what he did or had a mind to do; and the Philosopher generally wrote, as well as liv'd a Subject to the State. Their Motives might be Fear, Flattery, or a misguided Principle of Gratitude, because from the Government they enjoy'd the leisure and security of Contemplation, which is *Seneca's* reason why Philosophers, of all Men, are the most grateful to Princes. So that no steady State of this Duty is to be found any where, but in that Law Christ came to perfect, or in that Gospel he was the Author of. And 'tis observable that some of those Writers that have the most strongly press'd the Forgiveness of Injuries, liv'd very near our Saviour's time; the Light to lighten the Gentiles having visited them, with some of its Rays, before the Sun of Righteousness was it self risen.

No other Writers then being to be relied upon for a clear Discovery of this great Duty to us, but the inspir'd ones; I shall

1. Enquire whether Revenge was allow'd the Jews, because I find some that assert it.

2. I shall endeavour to enforce the great Duty of Forgiveness by such Arguments, as I conceive the most engaging to the Practice of it.

3. I shall consider some Mistakes that I conceive mislead Men from judging aright of the truth of their own Forgiveness.

1. En-

Enquire whether Revenge was allow'd the Jews? And if it can be made appear that 'twas not, there cannot a stronger Proof be brought for God's absolute disallowance of this mischievous Motion of the Spirit in all Cases whatsoever. For if Hearts so proverbially hard were yet to melt at the Command; and Necks so stiffen'd by the Iron Sinew in them, were to bow to it; if a People whose Peculiar was Malice, as they were God's, that so much thirsted after a Dispensation from this Duty of Forgiveness, could never obtain it; and Men that because of the hardness of their Hearts, were so far indulg'd as to part with their own Flesh when it had offended, were still to cleave fast to the Precept, had here no Writing of Divorcement allow'd by Moses or God; 'twas because the Duty was founded upon the everlasting Righteousness and Goodness of God, rested upon the Eternal Reason of things, was in its own Nature indispensable.

Levit. 19. 18.

Now that Text alone [*Thou shalt not avenge, or bear any grudge against the Children of thy People,*] seems to determine the Question, (since some will have it to be one) in as plain words as could well be made use of. Indeed a Writer of our own roundly tells us (but does no more) that a Jew might kill a Stranger, and consequently take any inferior Degree of Vengeance on him; and (that we may not mistake his meaning for the Nations devoted by God to Destruction,) he understands by Strangers, all along his Book, such of that kind, as the Jews were allow'd to take Usury of. Not now to contest with the Jew, his very odd Privilege of destroying all those he was permitted to make any Advantage by, (for he was to take no Usury of his Brother) this

this Writer had done well to have given us his Authority, as well as his Word, for what he advances; and to have told us who made the Jew this Concession, since God does not. For it looks a little inconsistent with this supposed Liberty of taking away his Life, that God should command them not to vex a Stranger; to love him; not to oppress him. Exod. 22. That he should make so merciful a provision for him: Deut. 10. For the corners of the Harvest Field, the glean- Exod. 23. ing of it and the single Grapes, were to be left for the Levit. 19. 9, 10. Poor and the Stranger. Also the third Years Tythe, Deut. 24. 19. the forgotten Sheaf, the Feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles were appointed for the relief of the Fatherless, Stranger, and Widow. Sure killing and Murder were softer names and things amongst the Jews than they were with Christians, that they could fall in and stand together, with so many Acts and Instances of Care, Kindness, Charity, and Compassion for the same Person. Exod. 21. 24. And whereas we find Retaliation granted, an Eye for an Eye, Hand for Hand, Foot for Foot, Wound for Wound, &c. as if the Jew might do to the Man as he had done to him, render to him according to his Work. This allowance was not made to the Party injur'd, in such sort as that he might by these Measures satisfy and distribute Justice to himself; but 'twas a Rule prescrib'd to the Judge, by which he should allot a Compensation for the Wrong done, and the even balance of Nature put into his Hand, to mete back the Damage by. And that 'twas not very acceptable to God, they should greedily lay hold on this kind of Reparation, (tho' of his own appointment,) seems evident from hence, that 'twas of such a Nature, that could not possibly do him any

any good that had it, since not one of all the Eyes of *Jewry* pluck'd out, or Feet lop'd off, would have fitted his Body, made him see or walk the better.

Nay, they themselves seem not to have thought it well-pleasing to God, that they should insist upon this kind of Satisfaction, for it does not appear (that I remember from the Old Testament,) that it was ever exacted in kind; and ^a *Josephus* informs us, that they were content to admit of a more useful Substitution, and that a Limb should be redeem'd with a Sum of Money: as *Aulus Gellius* tells us, that Law of the twelve Tables concerning ^c Maiming, had a like commutation of Penalty; and upon this ground ^d *Cecilius* there justifies that Law from *Phavorinus* his charge of Severity. Indeed we find great Allowances made for just and high Resentments upon extraordinary Occasions, as the Roman Laws permitted a Father to kill his Daughter that was an Adulteress, or him that had ravish'd her; and a ^e Husband to kill his Wife taken in the disloyal Act. But in these Cases the Law made them publick Persons. And amongst the *Hebrews* in Case of premeditated Murther, the next of Kin might destroy the Murtherer with his own Hand, but with this proviso, that the Avenger was himself to be put to Death, if it was after made out, that the Death of his Relation had not been maliciously contriv'd. But however a learned Man gives this as an Instance of private Revenge allow'd the *Jews*; 'tis not so clear a Proof of what 'tis brought for, for in this Case, the Sentence

^a Ὁ πηρώσας πασκέτω τα ὁμοία, πάλιν εἰ μὴ τι κρήμαλα λαβὼν ἐθε-
λήσειεν ὁ πεπηρωμένος. *Joseph. Antiq. lib. 4. Bas. 1544.*

^c Si membrum rupit Talio esto.

^d *Aul. Gell. lib. 20. cap. 1.*

^e *Aul. Gell. lib. 10. cap. 23.*

Sentence of the Law, (tho' less formal) seems already past, the Party offending under Condemnation, and the next of Kin allowed at least, if not appointed Executioner. And methinks the very Case supposes it, for the Qualification of the Murther's being premeditated, is proper matter of a legal Enquiry; to which I shall only add, that amongst the Institutes of the *Hasidai* or *Essens* (the devoutest Sect of the *Jews*,) there is this Form of Prayer to be found, ^h *Lord pardon and forgive all that trouble us:* Which favours so kindly of the Christian Spirit, that one would be apt to think, the *Messias* had taught them to pray, tho' he could not to believe.

2. I proceed to enforce this Christian Duty of Forgiveness, by such Arguments, as I conceive the most engaging to the Practice of it; and such as I shall insist on, shall be taken

1st, From the Reasonableness of this Duty in it self.

2^{dly}, From the great Weight our Saviour lays upon it, in order to our Title to our own Forgiveness.

3^{dly}, From the great Advantages we may make of our Enemies.

1st, From the Reasonableness of this Duty in it self,

By Reasonableness here I mean not such an Agreeableness to Nature, and Suitableness to the Make and Constitution of Mens Minds, which some (unwarily, and without due Limitations to certain Quali-

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fications

^h *Remitte & condona omnibus qui vexant nos.*

fications in Men) would have all the Precepts of the Christian Religion to carry along with them, but so far a conclusion of Reason, that such as are so far disengag'd from the Distractions of Life, as to think seriously, and from the Pravity of Nature, as to think usefully and aright; that can weigh present Inconveniencies, and see into after Consequences, must allow its Truth and Force. Which I thought fit thus to restrain, because of the delightful Schemes, and pleasurable Representations some have made of Religion, as if they design'd to divert rather than fix Mens Minds, and were providing an Entertainment instead of pressing an Obligation. By which means it comes to pass, that the Christian so lazily enters upon his Race, as if 'twere not to the Swift; and so carelessly manages, and is so ill appointed in his Warfare, as if that were not to the Strong neither; and practices Religion in such a manner, as to please himself whatever he may do God. Waving therefore the popular Argument, by which some have attempted to enforce this Precept, from the exquisite Pleasantness of it, lest Men should not find the Strength of it, or innocently bear their Disappointment; I shall endeavour to shew the Reasonableness of the Practice of this Duty, in the aforementioned Sense of the Word.

Indeed, in the Judgment of corrupt and undisciplin'd Nature, Revenge is counted an Argument of a Noble and Brave Spirit, a mark of Greatness and an evidence of Power.

To be quick and forward in taking notice of the least Affront, is for the Credit of Apprehension, and for the Reputation of the Readiness of his Understanding

derstanding that does it; and to revenge it is reckoned the Glory of his Might. When he, that in Compassion to the Infirmities of Nature, or in Regard to his Duty and Obligation as a Christian, shuts or turns away his Eyes that he may not see, and his other Senses too, as if he did not feel neither; or by an over-ruling Principle of Religion, passes by what those Senses cannot, shall be thought dull and insensible, of a low Spirit, and not much higher Understanding; too weak to do himself Right, or too ignorant to know that he had Wrong; and so must lose his Reputation, because he could not part with his Religion; suffer Reproaches in his Body and Mind, because the Christian was the Keeper of both. Whereas if we would judge according to the Nature of things, 'twould evidently appear, that He made better Proof of a great Spirit, that forgave the Trespas, since he shews a Superiority of Mind, that puts him above the Reach of what usually disorders human Life; evidences himself to be a Man of Experience, that (considering the state of corrupt Nature,) Offences will and must come, and therefore wisely concludes that they are to be born; and so is deliver'd from the impotent and ridiculous Rage of those that cannot revenge the Wrong, and the more mischievous and sinful one of those that do.

The Faultiness of these kind of Retributions is rightly stated by one of the *Platonists*,ⁱ who thus argues, If he that has first receiv'd the Wrong will

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always

ⁱ Max. Tyr. Dissert. 2. 'Αὐτὸς μετὰ τὴν τὸ κακὸν ἀπ' ἄλλου εἰς ἄλλον, καὶ μετὰ τὴν αὐτὸς διὰ τὴν αἰσχρονομίαν ἀδικίαν ἀδικίαν.

always return it, there will be a Reciprocation of Injury, and continued Circulation of mutual ill Offices; and adds, that he would without scruple affirm, that ^h he was less guilty that does the first Wrong, than he that returns it. The Truth of which Assertion in Religion appears hence, that he that does an Injury may possibly do it ignorantly, but no Christian can plead Ignorance of his Obligation to forgive. But in mischievous Acts that proceed from Knowledge and Judgment, he that first treats another ill, does it commonly from a regard (however mistaken) to the Desert of the Man, and from an Opinion of the Justice of his own Proceedings; so that any kind of Retaliation will be thought Injustice, because in return to what (as he conceiv'd) was justly inflicted; by which means the Aggressor now takes himself to be the injur'd Party. So that neglecting to cover one Sin, by that Charity, whose Office 'tis to hide a Multitude, the reciprocal Mischief makes each cry aloud for Satisfaction; and because both think themselves wrong'd, it seems unreasonable that either should make it; the round of Mischief moves quicker with the Circulation of their enrag'd Blood, and they are got into the enchanted Circle of mutual Wrong, where the evil Spirit rais'd, tears them both in pieces.

But that I may not be thought to insist upon such a Forgiveness as is void of any degrees of Charity 'tis capable of, I shall observe once for all, that we may and ought to make our Forgiveness as useful to the Trespasser as possibly we can; blot out his Sins
against

against us in such a manner, as he may yet read them, tho' we must not; and as far as may be, let this Goodness of ours too, lead him to Repentance.

Prudence should arrest the Forwardness of Charity in granting Pardons, and direct the dispensing of them in such a manner as to make them still pleadable, and order their suing out in the Great King's Bench, the Court of Heaven; for till this is done, our Brother may die (everlastingly) in Possession of all the Pardons the World can grant him.

Nor are we, by any Law of Religion, to permit a poysonous Breath to blast our Reputations, any more than we are to suffer the Wind to blow down our Dwellings, without ministring all necessary Supports for their standing.

Nay it is the greatest Injustice in us to endure it, for as much as here we part with more than is our own, let go a fair Possession, others, our Neighbourhood or Country, have an Interest in and Claim to, since without our Reputations we must in effect be useless in our Generations. And therefore by the Law of Charity, as well as of *England*, these worst of Robbers ought to have a Brand put upon them, as a Badge by which their base Profession may be known and their Persons avoided.

2dly, I come to consider the great Weight our Saviour lays upon our Forgiving others, in order to our Title to our own Forgiveness.

Not as if that single Act of Love manifested in passing by all the Injuries and Wrongs we can suffer from our Brother, was sufficient to entitle us to the Forgiveness of Heaven, for this would make a very short Scheme of Religion, and the whole Doctrine of practical

practical Christianity, to consist but of one Rule. But the meaning of the Text [*Forgive, and it shall be forgiven,*] is this, that where there is this active Principle of Love and Charity lodg'd and rooted in the Heart, if it be duly cultivated and rightly improv'd, wisely extended, and carefully directed towards the other Obligations of Christian Practice, it will have such a mighty Influence upon our whole Christian Conversation, that will wonderfully dispose to an uniform Rectitude of Life, and incline to universal Goodness, and so possess us of that indispensable qualification of an impartial Righteousness, to which all the Promises of the Gospel, and consequently that of Remission of Sins, are annex'd. To proceed then, I'll consider the infinite Mercy and most gracious Condescension of God, in making our Forgiving our Brother so great a part of our Title to Remission of the Offences committed against himself; because there is no proportion in Number betwixt our Trespases against God, and those of the most offensive of our Brethren against us, not now to insist on the infinitely different degrees of Aggravation.

Now who offends his Brother every Moment; nay there can be no Trespas in thought against our Brother, that can create any Difficulty in the Forgiveness of it; for whilst it rests there, before it comes forth in the mischievous Dress of Words or Actions, it can be no matter of Knowledge, and consequently none of Offence. So that this way of multiplying Offences, even to numberless, against God, the wickedness of our Thoughts can be no Tryal of any Man's Patience, or exercise of his Charity. Then as to the Repetition and Continuance of Transgressions,

ons, there is no Circumstance of Time or Place, but we may and do offend God in; but our selves being limited Objects, both of Good or Harm, capable of Advantage or Wrong, but in certain Degrees and Measures, at set times, and in some Circumstances only; the most offensive Brother, the worst dispos'd to Slander and evil Offices, cannot Daily, much less every Moment, harm us; the greatest stock of Malice being insufficient for such constant Expence. There wants Force in the strongest Arm to be always drawing the Bow, and Steadiness in the best Sight to be ever directing his Arrows at the same Mark; they must sometimes fly at others; the most malicious Breath, no more still moving the same way, than the Winds of Heaven blow towards the same Point of the Compass. So that the greatest Troubler of our Rest, can at most shake us but like an Ague, by Fits, and we have our well Days whilst others have their ill ones; it being God alone that can afflict universally, and Judgements, not the Malice of a private Breast, that have such a reach and comprehension. Again, Sins against God, and the way they are acted in, are of such a Nature, that we are never weary of ill doing; for we may be desperately wicked in thought, without much Labour of the Mind; and very impious in Practice by Sins of Omission, without any Weariness at all to the Flesh; since the Guilt is contracted by not doing at all. But all want of Charity, as well as Charity it self, so sensibly begins at home, that the malicious Man first wounds himself, before he can reach us; and this is such a check upon the intended Mischief, that there remains the less to be forgiven.

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3dly, We have great reason to forgive them, because of the good Use and Advantage we may make of our Enemies.

The Christian has so many Helps and Assistances in his way to Heaven, that there is nothing of so cross a Complexion, that can present to him in his Journey, but may make a part of his Direction, as a Rock or Sand at Sea, may assure us of the straitness of our Course. Charity, tho' she's said not to seek her own, makes every thing become so, is the greatest Manager in the World; like those St. Paul mentions, *Having nothing, and yet possessing all things*. The very Hatred and Aversions of the World become a part of her fairest Possessions, swell her Interests and enlarge her Treasury; and through an admirable Skill in her Course to Heaven, she makes way with the most contrary Wind that can blow. She can warm her self by the hottest Fire of Rage that can glow in any sinful Breast, nay walk in the midst of it, as the three Children did in the burning Furnace, without harm, having not so much as the smell of that Fire pass upon her. And though *she thinketh no Evil, rejoiceth not in Iniquity*, like God (to whom that Character belongs, and whose Gift she is,) she can bring good out of all kinds thereof, make the worst Action, the worst Man, minister richly to her. Whatever the Seed or Sower be, she reaps a good Harvest; not one Thorn or Thistle but bears her Grapes and Figs. She compounds Physick of all the Wormwood and Centaury of the most unmanur'd Field, and makes a Generation of Vipers (as natural ones do) yield an excellent Remedy. And truly, if nothing but the Virtues of Mankind would

would feed our Souls, and turn to Christian Nourishment, this sort of Food is so scarce and hard to come by, that they might starve and die for Hunger. Till then we can arrive to such an happiness of Constitution, as to thrive by this coarser Fare, get Flesh and fair Countenance, (like *Daniel*, *Hannah*, *Michael* and *Azariah*;) from the Pulse and Water; serve up the Sins and Guilt of the World to our Uses and Heavenly Purposes, gather Strength from the Weakness and Infirmities of Men, their Lusts and Passions and other impotencies of Flesh; there will be Want and its Consequences too, and we may cry out with the Prophet, *O my Leanness, my Leanness, wa is me, my Leanness!*

3. I come to remove such Mistakes as mislead Men in their Judgments concerning their own Forgiveness.

The first Mistake I shall take notice of, is theirs who think they have paid a fair Obedience to the Law of Charity, when they strike the Offender only by the impartial Hand of that of the Land. But he that will forgive no farther than the Law does, is not less under the Dominion of his Resentments, but more of his Covetousness; barter away his Passions in exchange for worse Vices; makes his Affections (the first-born of his Soul) stoop to the evil Habits of it; the elder serve the younger, forbears striking with his own Hand, (just with as much Kindness as *David* shewed *Uriah*) but by some Writ or Instrument of Law (like the King's Letter to *Joab*) puts him in the Fore-front of the hottest Battle, where he hopes he cannot escape.

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And here *Seneca's* Exhortation with *Alexander*, relating to *Lysimachus*, seems very applicable, who tells him, 'twas all one to throw *Lysimachus* to the Lyon, or tear him in pieces with his own Teeth.

But this is to be understood of private Wrongs, for where Persons are publick, Rights are so too; here the Law is open, there are Deputies; we may, nay we ought to implead one another, have such matters determin'd in a lawful Assembly. All our publick Employments are Tallents, which (like those committed to the Servants in the Gospel) must be accounted for to our Successors, (as so many Lords) at their coming. We are but Guardians to them, and therefore should have a care how we wrong'd these Pupils of ours, or embezell'd any part of their Estate. And, tho' as a peaceable private Christian I am commanded to offer the other Cheek to him that smites me on the one, and not forbid him that taketh away my Cloak to take my Coat also, there's no Text that enjoyns me, to give others Backs to the Smilers, or their Cheeks to them that pluck off the Hair, or to give away their Coat and Cloak which are mine only, till their Turn comes to put them on. And methinks this is like their (no very religious) Practice, in *Zenophon*, that made a Sacrifice of Beasts they had first stolen out of other Mens Fields.

2dly, Another Mistake in some Mens Forgiveness, is, that they think they may consign the Trespasser

Quid enim interest, Oro te Alexander, Leoni Lysimachum objicias, an ipse laferas dentibus tuis? Seneca de Clement. lib. I.

passer to the Judgment of God, for tho' this is not to do or with him any Wrong, since 'tis impossible he should receive any from that righteous Bar, such a removal of the Cause to the Court above, is so far from letting it fall, or making way for his Forgiveness that does it, that it mightily inflames his Guilt; since in Truth, such an Appellant to infinite Justice first prejudices his own Case, and then calls upon Truth it self, to fall in with and execute his fallible Sentence, and consigns his Adversary over to an omnipotent Arm, because he finds his own too weak for the intended Stroke.

3^{dly}, A third Mistake in judging of the Truth of our Forgiveness, may proceed from a Principle of Sloth, that may look like Religion, and yet have nothing of it; for some Men are too heavy to move at the rate an eager Resentment calls upon them to do, too lazy for the Work and Labour of Revenge, too drowzy and sleepy to rise, arm, and fall upon the Enemy, as oft as the restless Passion gives the alarm, without entertaining the least thought of forgiving him, and so drop the Cause only to be deliver'd from the Trouble and Charge of a Prosecution. So that indeed these Men are true Lovers of their Ease, rather than of their Brother, or God.

4^{thly}, The last Mistake I shall mention in Mens judging aright of the Sincerity of their Forgiveness, is an Opinion that they have in due manner forgiven such Trespases, the Impressions of which are worn out of their Minds. This is forgetting, but not forgiving our Enemies, since Forgiveness is properly our own Work, and not one of Time. But if

barely to retain nothing in the Faculty of remembrance against our Brother, would answer our Obligations to the Law of Charity towards him, there need no Precepts be given to enforce their Duty of Forgiveness upon many old Men, since the declensions of Age would naturally bring them to the Practice of it. And he must have very odd Notions of Goodness, that can believe the whole frame of the Soul better'd (as 'tis when Forgiveness is duly practis'd) by the Decay of one of its most noble Faculties, the Memory, or the necessary slidings of the former Occurrences of Life thence. Nay upon this Foot the Plague (a Disease as remarkable for its Malice as its Danger,) might entitle Men to the Practice of this Duty of Forgiveness, since the Historian acquaints us, that one of the dire Effects of that dreadful Plague that rag'd at *Athens*, was, that the Notices of all things that had happen'd in the former part of their Lives, were so perfectly effac'd in their Minds, that (upon their Recovery) they neither knew themselves, nor the nearest of their Relations. So that 'tis not enough to lose any uncharitable Impressions out of the Mind, because we could not keep them there, but because (from an intuition upon the Command) we believe we ought not, that can entitle us to a due Practice of Christian Forgiveness.

But then Forgiveness in his sincerest State, does not require such unreasonable Evidences of its Truth,

^m Thucyd. lib. 2. de Bel. Pelopon. Τὴς δὲ καὶ λήθη ἐλάμβανε, παραυτίκα ἀνασάντας ὅτι πάντων ὁμοίως, καὶ ἡνέκησεν σφᾶς τε αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ δόξῃ.

Truth, as that we should give our selves to them whom we have forgiven, make no distinction betwixt them and our old tryed Friends, lodge them in their Apartments, our Bosoms; since a fierce Creature, so lately tam'd, is not to be trusted there, lest his former Temper (not perfectly subdued) start up again, and the Fate of that Greek Boy prove ours, who having stolen a little wild Beast and hid it in that Place, had his Bowels torn out by it. Besides, some Tempers are such, that we cannot hope to better them, and Conversation so insipid, that they will not better us. Some are so rough and offensive, that it is running into Temptations to converse with them. So that Charity, that is every where but where it can do no good, and is in danger of losing it self, seems excused from that Labour of Love, that is so like to be in vain, or destructive of the great Virtue it self. And though upon a Reconciliation made, I must give my Brother my Heart and Affections, I need not sure give him my Head and Understanding too; as every one that reposes Trust and Confidence in such a Man does. For though I may be sure I have forgiven another from my Heart, I cannot be so certain that he has forgiven me from his; and therefore, though I cannot love my Brother too well, I may trust my Brother too far: for Trust is an Act of Prudence and not of Charity, and so falls under no Obligation of Religion. We must do then by our offending Brother, at his return to us, as the Father did by his prodigal Son, kill the fatted Calf and bid him welcome, entertain him with Complacency and Rejoycing, (answerable to the Mu-

sicks

sicks and Dancing) and all that is engaging of his stay with us: But our Friend, like the eldest Son, was ever with us; and all that we have, the Secrets of our Hearts and Bosoms, are his.

I am not ignorant, that it has been customary to distinguish an Affize Sermon from others, by crowding into it the Persons and Business belonging to these stated Solemnities; and therefore it may possibly have been expected, that tho' my Text was taken out of the *Proverbs*, the subject Matter should have been fetch'd from the Town-Hall. But I have observ'd such unjust Seisures in the Pulpit of your Lordship's Rights, to give Charges, that a just Judge cannot but condemn them, as he must all other Invasions of Property; and they have been sometimes manag'd with so little Decency, and drawn up so like Impeachments, as if your Lordships came hither not so much to honour our Assemblies, as to appear like Criminals at our Bar. I shall not therefore follow Precedents, but leave them to their proper Place, finding them to be of better Use and more Authority in Law than Divinity; more becoming a Court than a Church.

As to the learned Gentlemen of the Bar, however improperly I may have happen'd to manage this Occasion, I need not be afraid of their Censure, since I know them to be Men of more Honour and Justice than to condemn any Man unheard.

And tho' whilst I have been here lifting up my Voice, I have not acted the Cryer's Part, call'd upon the Jury by Name; yet I conceive I have been speaking to them too; for if they have once perfectly learn'd the great Lesson of Forgiving their Brother,

ther, 'twill lead them into such a Verdict in any Cause that concerns him, as may not stand in need of his Forgiveness. But tho' I have not wandred into the Court where some possibly expected to find me, I hope none here present will forget that I was in the Pulpit.

Now to God the Father, &c.

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